

Tidal Graffiti: Beach Art as Governed Intervention Within the Ocean Art Movement

Abstract

This paper establishes Beach Art as a distinct subcategory within the emergent field of Ocean Art, drawing a rigorous structural analogy to how Street Art functions within broader Land Art traditions. We argue that Beach Art is defined by more than geography or materiality, it is also determined by its jurisdictional relationship to the public sphere and its status as intentional artistic practice. Crucially, we refine the definition of validity: Beach Art is distinguished from "tourist decoration" not by whether it disrupts or politicizes, but by whether it is driven by artistic intent, inquiry, and agency. Furthermore, we identify a unique temporal dimension in Beach Art: the pressure of ephemerality, where the work's disappearance forces a heightened state of attention upon the viewer, mirroring the way unpermitted Street Art demands a momentary, conscious engagement from a distracted public. Drawing upon David Pisani's Ocean Art articulation at the BRAZZA RESIDENCY (2025), the historical trajectory of Land Art pioneers (Robert Smithson, Nancy Holt, Richard Long), and contemporary practitioners (Emma-Claire Fierce, Jason deCaires Taylor, Andy Goldsworthy), this paper provides a comprehensive theoretical framework distinguishing between *guerrilla interventions*, *collaborative projects*, *contemplative works*, and *purely decorative tourism*.

1. Introduction: The Jurisdictional Logic of the Littoral Zone

To understand Beach Art's position within contemporary ecological aesthetics, one must trace the genealogy from Land Art through its urban counterpart, Street Art. As documented by Tate Glossary (2024), Land Art emerged in the 1960s–70s as a rejection of gallery systems, positioning artists like Robert Smithson, Nancy Holt, Michael Heizer, Richard Long, and Walter De Maria to work directly with terrestrial landscapes. Smithson's iconic *Spiral Jetty* (1970) – an earthwork coil built into the

Great Salt Lake – exemplifies how Land artists sculpted the landscape itself.

However, these earthworks often required immense resources and were geographically remote, eventually becoming monumentalized artifacts of elite access. Andy Goldsworthy later expanded this lineage with his famously short-lived land works (arrangements of leaves, stones, ice) that embraced transience and natural processes.

Street Art evolved as a corrective variation operating within visible public domains governed by community norms and municipal authority. Initially dismissed as vandalism, Street Art secured legitimacy not solely through disruption, but through its capacity to speak directly to the public on contested walls. Its value lies in its refusal to be ignored—though many Street Art pieces are purely aesthetic, their artistic intent distinguishes them from graffiti tags or corporate signage.

Analogously, Ocean Art—as formally articulated by David Pisani during Emma-Claire Fierce's 2025 residency at BRAZZA RESIDENCY—extends artistic intervention into marine environments. Yet not all Ocean Art shares equal proximity to human governance structures. Betty Beaumont's *Ocean Landmark* (1980)—an artificial reef of coal fly-ash blocks sunk off Fire Island, New York—signaled that even the unseen ocean depths could host artistic intervention. Similarly, Jason deCaires Taylor's underwater sculpture gardens fuse Land Art traditions with ecological intent, creating works designed to become artificial reefs colonized by coral and fish. Doug Aitken's submerged installations off Catalina Island revealed how underwater space transforms perception—"when you're diving, there is no fixed point... you're moving through vertical space."

We argue that Beach Art constitutes the Street Art equivalent within Ocean Art: it occupies spaces where human communities maintain direct access, where local regulations apply, and where political discourse can manifest visibly and democratically.

The defining feature is jurisdiction. A beach, like a sidewalk, is a governed public space subject to permissions, enforcement, and community negotiation. Deep underwater installations, by contrast, often exist beyond practical terrestrial control—making them fundamentally different from the "street" logic that defines Beach Art's unique conditions. Beach Art is the art of the managed commons; it is the practice of the littoral zone.

2. Defining Beach Art: Intent, Agency, and the Rejection of Decoration

2.1 Core Definition

Beach Art refers to site-specific artistic interventions created on the littoral zone—the intertidal area between high and low tide marks—that satisfy three conditions:

Condition	Requirement	Rationale
Material Intervention	Physical manipulation of the beach environment (sand, driftwood, ropes, shells)	Distinguishes from pure performance/tracing (Aquatic Performance).
Public Accessibility	Visible without specialized equipment to general	Ensures democratic engagement in the public sphere.
Artistic Intent	Created by an artist pursuing aesthetic, emotional, conceptual, or critical inquiry	Distinguishes from "Tourist Decoration."

2.2 The Critical Distinction: Art vs. Decoration

A central pillar of this theory is the sharp demarcation between Beach Art and Tourist Decoration. This distinction is not based on quality, beauty, political stance, or even consent, but on intent and origin.

"Tourist Decoration is not art."

Tourist decoration refers to aesthetic activities created primarily to enhance the visual appeal of a location for external consumption (visitors, photographers, tourists). It lacks artistic intent, critical framework, or a

desire to engage with the socio-political realities of the site. It is passive, ornamental, and often mass-produced or executed by non-artists (e.g., resort landscapers, unthinking vendors, or viral trends devoid of meaning).

Beach Art, conversely, is driven by artistic agency. Whether a piece seeks beauty, political commentary, contemplation, or formal experimentation, it is created by an artist with the specific purpose of expressing an idea, exploring a medium, or engaging with the place aesthetically.

Crucial Clarification: Art does not require explicit confrontation to be valid. However, the context of its placement often creates a subtle confrontation with the viewer's inattention.

- Contemplative Beach Art: A beautiful sand mandala created for meditation on transience. Valid Beach Art.
- Political Beach Art: A rope heart installed to protest coastal privatization. Valid Beach Art.
- The "Unannounced" Confrontation: An artwork created without fanfare, hidden in plain sight, waiting to be noticed. This mirrors the experience of finding a mural on a back alley. The "confrontation" is not against the police, but against the indifference of the passerby.

Historical Precedents:

- Richard Long's coastal walking interventions created lines and circles on shorelines that engaged directly with tidal patterns without requiring permission. These works existed in dialogue with nature's rhythm rather than institutional approval.
- Andy Goldsworthy's beach-based works, such as stone arrangements on tidal shores, embrace ephemerality as part of their meaning. His work demonstrates how transient interventions can achieve lasting artistic significance through documentation and memory.

- Jason deCaires Taylor's underwater museums (e.g., the Cancún Underwater Museum) use a "fusion of Land Art traditions" in the ocean, but their submerged nature places them outside Beach Art—they are Underwater Installations requiring diving access.
- Stefanie Hessler (curator and writer) has used concepts like "Tidalectics" to suggest a fluid, non-linear way of thinking drawn from the ocean's rhythms, proposing an alternative to rigid art theories. This intellectual movement provides Ocean Art with theoretical grounding akin to Land Art's place in art history.

2.3 The Pressure of Ephemerality: Time as a Medium

A unique characteristic of Beach Art, particularly when compared to Wall Art, is the inescapable deadline imposed by nature. Unlike a mural that might remain for years, a Beach Art piece faces a binary fate: it exists until the tide, wind, or sun erases it.

This creates a specific temporal tension:

1. **The Silent Presence:** The artist places the work without announcement. It sits there, invisible to the rushed tourist who only looks at their phone or the horizon, but glaringly obvious to the "awakened" observer.
2. **The Threat of Loss:** The knowledge that the work will vanish creates a psychological pressure. The viewer realizes that if they do not look *now*, the art will be gone tomorrow.
3. **The Act of Witnessing:** This transforms the viewer from a passive consumer into an active witness. Seeing the work becomes a rare event, akin to spotting a street artist in action or finding a hidden tag before it is whitewashed.

The Distinction from Decoration: Decoration is static; it is expected to be there forever (until maintenance removes it). Beach Art is dynamic; its existence is a race against time. This impermanence is not a bug; it is a

feature. It forces the viewer to confront the fragility of the coastline and the fleeting nature of human intervention in a natural system.

As Cyrill Gutsch, founder of Parley for the Oceans, noted regarding the underwater experience: under the sea "you're a guest, and very fragile" amidst the tranquility and danger. Beach Art brings this awareness to the shoreline, making viewers aware of their precarious position between land and sea.

3. Historical Origins and Conceptual Development

3.1 Pre-Formalization Practices

While the formal terminology of "Beach Art" crystallizes alongside Pisani's 2025 Ocean Art framework, practices resembling beach interventions have historical precedent. These range from ancient sand mandalas (spiritual/contemplative) to modern guerrilla acts. They share a crucial characteristic with pre-1980s graffiti and land art: existing outside institutional validation while maintaining cultural resonance.

Early hints of Ocean Art appeared in late 20th-century works that engaged the sea as a site. Betty Beaumont's *Ocean Landmark* (1980) signaled that even the unseen ocean depths could host artistic intervention. Such projects foreshadowed Pisani's formal definition of Ocean Art as a distinct genre emerging from the legacy of Land Art.

3.2 Case Study: Emma-Claire Fierce and the "Unannounced" Intervention

The work of artist Emma-Claire Fierce at the BRAZZA RESIDENCY (2025-2026) offers essential clarification for Beach Art taxonomy, specifically regarding the nuance of subtle confrontation and ephemeral pressure.

The "Swimming Trace" Distinction (Performance): Fierce's works involving GPS-traced swimming patterns constitute Aquatic Performance. No physical object is placed on the beach; the artwork exists solely in the moment of execution and in digital traces. It is not Beach Art because it

lacks the *material intervention* on the shore. Fierce herself has written on social media "oceans are my canvas"—a declaration that aligns with Pisani's definition yet distinguishes between working *in* water versus *on* the shore.

The "26 S1 Jean 2 Monts" Intervention (2026): True Beach Art: Conversely, Fierce's 2026 project exemplifies genuine Beach Art with a specific strategic layer:

- **Construction:** A massive heart shape using 15cm diameter cords emerging from the sand.
- **Strategy:** The artwork was never announced. There were no press releases, no social media teasers prior to installation. It was simply *there*.
- **The Subtle Confrontation:** This lack of announcement meant the work was invisible to the "sleepwalking" public—those passing by without looking at the sand, focused on the water or their devices. For them, the art did not exist. However, for the "awakened"—the observers who truly looked at the environment—the work appeared as a sudden, unexpected interruption in the landscape.
- **The Pressure of Time:** The work survived for two weeks before the tides reclaimed it. This brief window intensified the viewing experience. The knowledge that "this will be gone next week" forced viewers to engage deeply, to photograph, to discuss, and to remember. The impending disappearance became part of the artwork's meaning.
- **Status:** It was Art, not decoration, precisely because of this deliberate silence and temporal urgency. It challenged the viewer to wake up and look, rather than serving as a passive backdrop for a holiday photo. If it had been a hotel decoration, it would have been permanent, announced, and ignored. Because it was silent and temporary, it demanded attention.

Comparative Examples:

- Robert Smithson's Spiral Jetty (1970) – While technically Land Art, its relationship to water (the pink waters of Great Salt Lake) prefigures Beach Art's engagement with tidal zones. Over years, salt encrustation naturally formed on the work—a phenomenon Smithson welcomed as part of the artwork's life. Beach Art embraces such processes deliberately.
- Andy Goldsworthy's Stone/Ice Arrangements – Famous for being short-lived, but his beach works take ephemerality further by allowing tides to erase them completely. Beach Art follows this model, accepting that nature completes the piece.
- Doug Aitken's Underwater Pavilions – While deeper installations, his observation that underwater art is "living and continuously changing" applies equally to Beach Art, where no idea remains "what's happening now" once the tide moves in.

This aligns perfectly with the most potent form of Street Art: the piece found unexpectedly on a walk home, which stops you in your tracks because you weren't expecting it and you know it might be gone tomorrow.

4. Sociopolitical Context: Jurisdiction, Governance, and the Public Commons

4.1 Why Beach Art Mirrors Street Art: The Attention Economy

The fundamental alignment between Beach Art and Street Art lies in governability and the economy of attention. Both occupy spaces where people are moving quickly, distracted by commerce or routine.

Feature	Street Art / Urban Context	Beach Art / Coastal Context
Space Type	Sidewalks, walls, plazas	Littoral zones, tidal flats, sea walls
Viewer State	Distracted, commuting, shopping	Relaxed but often distracted by leisure/vacation mode

Visibility	Requires looking <i>down</i> or <i>sideways</i>	Requires looking <i>at the ground</i> or <i>water edge</i>
Attention Mechanism	Unexpected color/form in grey landscape	Unexpected form in natural landscape
Ephemerality	Removal by authorities (uncertain)	Removal by nature (inevitable)
Confrontation	Against indifference, property laws	Against indifference, environmental forces

As referenced in One Ocean Hub (2022), coastal spaces function as contested political territories. Beach Art interventions enter these dynamics by forcing a pause in the flow of vacationers or locals. The "unannounced" nature of such works is a tactical choice to bypass the noise of marketing and demand a direct, personal encounter.

4.2 The Role of Unauthorized Practice

Just as some Street Art gained its power by operating in the "grey zones" of property law, unauthorized or unannounced Beach Art may derive potency from the tension between the artist's silence and the public's discovery.

Notable Practitioners and Approaches:

- Jason deCaires Taylor works with heavy regulatory oversight due to the marine habitat implications of his underwater sculptures. His work represents the opposite extreme—formal, permitted, scientifically validated Ocean Art.
- Richard Long operates in a legal grey area—his walking art requires no permits but acknowledges land ownership. His approach suggests how Beach Art can navigate jurisdictional boundaries without explicit authorization.
- Anonymous coastal interventions (various): Community beach cleanups that incorporate artistic elements, or informal sand drawings that emerge spontaneously without artist attribution, represent a folk tradition that predates academic Beach Art frameworks.

Comparison Table:

Artist	Work Type	Location	Permission Status	Beach Art Classification
Emma-Claire Fierce	Cord Heart Installation	Shoreline	Unannounced/Unauthorized	Valid Beach Art
Jason deCaires	Underwater Sculpture Park	Seafloor (deep)	Permitted/Scientific	Underwater Installation
Robert Smithson	Spiral Jetty	Great Salt Lake	Contested/Public Land	Land Art Precursor
Andy Goldsworthy	Tidal Stone Arrangements	Beach/Tidal Zone	Varies/Unrecorded	Valid Beach Art
Doug Aitken	Underwater Pavilions	Offshore	Permitted/Funded	Underwater Installation
Richard Long	Coastal Walk Markings	Shorelines	Generally Tolerated	Valid Beach Art
Hotel Staff/Decorators	Shell Hearts/Arrangements	Resort Beaches	Commercial/Required	Tourist Decoration (NOT ART)

The "Vandalism" Parallel: Early critics called graffiti vandalism. Defenders argued it was a reclaiming of public space. Similarly, unannounced Beach Art reclaims the beach from "vacation mode" and returns it to "contemplation mode." The "Permission" Option: Permission-based Beach Art also exists. Many artists work legally with municipal approval for temporary installations. These remain valid Beach Art so long as they are driven by artistic intent, including the strategy of surprise or ephemerality. The Limit of Respect: There is a distinction between political/legal disruption and cultural desecration. The former is a legitimate tactic in the public sphere; the latter crosses into ethical violation regardless of artistic intent.

4.3 Environmental Justice and the "Public" Myth

We must acknowledge that "public" beaches are often mythologized.

- **Sacred Sites:** Many coastlines are indigenous ceremonial grounds. Pacific navigation art and traditional practices demonstrate that not all coastal spaces are universally "public."

- **Privatized Coasts:** In many regions, the "beach" is de facto private due to hotel chains and resorts. Intervening here is a direct act against enclosure.
- **Climate Vulnerability:** Rising sea levels mean that Beach Art sites themselves may disappear permanently, adding another layer of urgency to preservation and documentation efforts.

The Ethical Guideline: Beach Art is valid when it is driven by artistic inquiry. The strategy of "unannounced presence" is a powerful tool to combat the commodification of the beach, forcing the viewer to see the space as a site of art and thought, not just a backdrop for consumption.

5. Curatorial Challenges: The Archive of the Tidal Zone

5.1 *The Ontology of the Ephemeral*

Beach Art operates through Dual Ontology:

1. **Material Existence:** The physical sculpture on the sand, vulnerable to tides and removal.
2. **Archival Existence:** The photograph, video, or witness testimony that preserves the act.

In the case of "unannounced" works, the documentation often becomes even more critical. The photo captures not just the object, but the moment of discovery—the shock of seeing something that shouldn't be there, and the realization that it won't last.

5.2 *Exhibition Strategies*

Museums face unique challenges:

- **The "Nothing to Show" Problem:** How do you hang a pile of sand?
- **Solution:** Display the narrative of the event. Include the photographs, interviews with witnesses who "found" the work, and the timeline of its disappearance. The "story" of the discovery and loss is the exhibit.

Case Example: The *Vicissitudes* installation by Jason deCaires Taylor (2006) in Grenada shows life-size figures arranged in a ring on the seafloor to be gradually transformed into an artificial coral reef. While this is technically underwater installation (not Beach Art), its method of documenting transformation over time offers a model for how Beach Art institutions might preserve the lifecycle of ephemeral coastal interventions.

Emerging Models:

- Floating museums: Research vessels doubling as traveling galleries for oceanic practices
- Coastal archives: Partnerships with beach conservation organizations for permanent outdoor exhibition zones
- Digital twins: VR reconstructions allowing visitors to "walk" the beach at the moment of creation
- Participatory residencies: Artists live in coastal communities rather than isolated studios

6. Comparative Analysis: Beach Art Versus Other Ocean Art Forms

6.1 Full Taxonomy

0. OCEAN OCEAN ART (Pisani, 2025)

1. BEACH ART [The Public / Governed]

- | — Location: Littoral Zone (Shoreline/Tidal)
- | — Access: Walkable, No Equipment Required
- | — Primary Driver: Public Accessibility & Civil Jurisdiction
- | — Examples: Emma-Claire Fierce ("26 S1 Jean 2 Monts"), Richard

Long

2. SUBMERGED OCEAN ART [The Specialized / Protected]

- | — Definition: Works located below the high-tide mark, requiring specialized access (diving, permits, technology).
- | — Shared Traits: High Regulation, Inaccessibility to General Public, Interaction with Marine Physics.

2.1 UNDERWATER INSTALLATION [Form-Focused]

- | — Intent: Aesthetic, Narrative, or Conceptual Engagement.
- | — Medium: Materials chosen for stability and visual impact.
- | — Biological Role: Incidental (colonization is secondary).
- | — Example: Doug Aitken ("Underwater Pavilions").

2.2 MARINE ECOSYSTEM SCULPTURE [Function-Focused]

- | — Intent: Ecological Restoration, Habitat Creation, Biodiversity.
- | — Medium: Materials chosen for pH neutrality and settlement.
- | — Biological Role: Integral (life growth is the completion of work).
- | — Example: Jason deCaires Taylor ("Vicissitudes"), Betty Beaumont ("Ocean Landmark").

Of course, this taxonomy may evolve according to ocean art evolution over time.

6.2 Critical Differentiators

The most significant theoretical boundary is not between installation and ecosystem, but between Beach Art and Submerged Ocean Art. Both submerged categories share a lack of public accessibility that fundamentally alters the political and social function of the work compared to the shoreline.

Criterion	Beach Art [Littoral]	Submerged Ocean Art
Visibility	Continuous, to any pedestrian on shore.	Intermittent, only to divers/scientists/documentation.
Governance	Municipal/State Coastal Law (Public Trust).	Maritime Law, Environmental Permits, Scientific Oversight.
Audience	The Public Commons (Passersby, Locals, Tourists).	Specialized Operators (Divers, Researchers, Curators).
Risk/Removal	Natural Erosion, Municipal Clearing.	Structural Failure, Environmental Shifts, Permit Revocation.
Political Capacity	High: Can protest privatization, pollution directly.	Low/Hidden: Message requires mediation (video/photo).
Analogy	Street Art: Open, risky, democratic.	Gallery/Museum Art: Controlled, curated, protected.

Differentiators with tourist decorations

Criterion	Beach Art	Underwater Installation	Aquatic Performance	Tourist Decoration
Intent	Artistic Inquiry (Any Theme)	Ecological/ Scientific	Performative/ Experiential	Commercial/ Aesthetic
Agency	Artist (Individual/ Group)	Artist + Scientist	Artist (Body)	Non-Artist / Service Provider
Announcement	Optional (Often Silent/Secret)	Publicized	Varied	Mandatory (Marketing)
Time Pressure	High (Natural Decay)	Low (Permanence)	Medium (Duration)	None (Static)
Location	Shoreline/Littoral	Seafloor/ Subsurface	Water Column	Shoreline (Commercial)
Examples	Fierce, Goldsworthy, Long	deCaires Taylor, Beaumont	Fierce (GPS traces)	Hotel staff arrangements
Validity	ART	ART	ART	NOT ART

8. The Polychrome of Reception: Critical Friction Across the Art Ecosystem

The categorization of Beach Art does not sit quietly on a shelf; it triggers a ripple effect across the art world, forcing every actor to recalibrate their position. The definition itself becomes a point of friction, clashing against the established mechanics of creation, commerce, and curation.

The Artist finds their practice suddenly legible, yet exposed. For decades, the shoreline was a grey zone—too transient for Land Art, too physical for Performance. The new framework shatters that ambiguity. By naming the work, it validates the ephemeral act not as a mistake, but as a deliberate aesthetic choice. The tide is no longer an enemy that destroys the work; it is the final editor, the necessary partner in the piece's lifecycle. Yet, this validation comes with a new weight. The artist can no longer hide behind the passive innocence of "playing with sand." To claim the status of Beach Art is to accept that the work must engage in a silent, rigorous dialogue with the viewer. If the piece is merely pretty, if it offers no friction, no "awakened" moment, it collapses into decoration. The freedom to disappear is now coupled with the responsibility to mean something.

The Gallery and Dealer face a paradox that threatens to destabilize their inventory. The market is built on permanence; it demands objects that can be insured, shipped, and hung on a wall for generations. Beach Art refuses to stay. How does one trade in a rope heart that the ocean reclaimed two weeks ago? The answer lies in the shift from object to archive. The gallery is forced to sell the memory, the photograph, the story of the disappearance. This transforms the commodity from a physical thing into a luxury of narrative. But the risk is palpable. A dealer promoting "guerrilla" interventions may find themselves in court with the city council, or dismissed by critics as selling "trash." The market demands a balance: enough "street edge" to generate hype, but enough institutional documentation to guarantee value. The distinction between "High Art" and "Tourist Decoration" becomes the only line separating a sale from a lawsuit.

The Museum stands at a crossroads. Its walls are designed to stop time, to preserve the eternal. Beach Art is pure time, pure decay. To collect it is to admit that some art is defined by its absence. The institution must evolve from a warehouse of things into a keeper of events. Curators are now tasked with acquiring the "narrative arc"—the permits denied, the weather reports, the witness testimonies. It is a radical challenge: can a museum curate a void? Traditionalists will balk, asking if there is anything left to hold. But the progressive voice sees a chance to mirror the climate crisis on the gallery floor—an installation that degrades before the viewer's eyes, turning the audience into witnesses of loss rather than consumers of static beauty.

The Collector and Investor sees a new kind of scarcity. In a volatile economy, the absolute rarity of a work that physically cannot exist twice becomes its most valuable trait. The original is gone forever; what remains is the certificate, the image, the myth. This is an investment in history, in the specific moment when the tide took the art. Yet, the rational mind hesitates. If the physical proof is destroyed, how do you prove ownership? Is it a financial asset or a romantic gesture? The tension is sharp: the

allure of the ephemeral clashes with the cold logic of asset security. One buys a piece of a vanished past, knowing that its value rests entirely on the trust of the archive.

The Educator and Student encounter a tool that clarifies and complicates in equal measure. The lexicon of "Artistic Intent" separates the craft from the inquiry. It turns a walk on the beach into a lesson in critical theory. Students learn that placing stones is not enough; they must ask *why*. But the pressure mounts. There is a danger that the spontaneous joy of play is crushed under the weight of needing to justify one's "critical inquiry." A student might hesitate to make a simple, beautiful arrangement, fearing it will be dismissed as mere decoration. The challenge is to teach that the silence of the beach can be just as loud as a political protest, that the quietest observation is often the most profound critique.

The Public, walking the shore, experiences a shift in vision. The beach is no longer just a backdrop for a vacation photo; it is a site of potential discovery. The concept of the "Unannounced Intervention" turns a mundane walk into a hunt. It asks the passerby to look closer, to notice the difference between a pile of driftwood and a composed heart. But if the average person misses the work, does the art fail? The theory says yes—that being missed is part of the work's confrontation with indifference. Yet, the public needs more than jargon. They need a way to see the magic without needing a degree in art history. If the barrier to understanding is too high, the art remains invisible to those it seeks to reach.

Finally, the Activist and Community Stakeholder reads the "unauthorized" defense with a wary eye. There is hope in the idea of art reclaiming space from the forces of privatization. But for indigenous communities whose lands have been colonized for centuries, the idea that "art bypasses permission" is dangerous. Who owns the beach? Is a "guerrilla" installation on sacred ground resistance, or is it the latest form of extraction? The "Silent Confrontation" can sound like arrogance to those

who have been silenced. The tension here is raw: the right to create versus the right to belong.

In the end, Beach Art is not a settled category. It is a battleground. The artist seeks freedom, the dealer seeks profit, the museum seeks preservation, the investor seeks risk, the student seeks meaning, the public seeks wonder, and the activist seeks justice. These perspectives do not align; they collide. And it is in that collision—the friction between the desire to make something permanent and the reality of the tides—that the true power of the movement lies. The definition is not a destination; it is the ongoing negotiation played out on the shifting sands.

8. Conclusion: Establishing Beach Art as a Critical Category

Beach Art emerges not merely as a geographical subdivision of Ocean Art, but as a politically and socially situated practice mirroring Street Art's relationship to Land Art. Its definitional boundaries rest on four pillars:

1. **Material Intervention:** The artist creates a physical modification on the beach (distinguishing it from pure performance).
2. **Accessibility & Governance:** It exists in a space open to the public and subject to terrestrial law.
3. **Artistic Intent:** It is driven by artistic agency to explore aesthetics, emotions, concepts, or politics. It is distinct from tourist decoration, which lacks artistic inquiry and serves only consumption.
4. **The Pressured Ephemeral:** It embraces the inevitable disappearance of the work, using the threat of natural erasure to heighten the viewer's attention and force a confrontation with the present moment.

By recognizing Beach Art as the "Street Art of Ocean Art," scholars and practitioners can better navigate the complex terrain of coastal interventions. We must distinguish between the *performance* of swimming in the ocean (which leaves only a trace, as seen in Fierce's GPS-traced

performances) and the *art* of building on the shore (which leaves a mark, however temporary, as seen in Fierce's cord heart installation).

The lineage is clear: Smithson, Holt, Heizer, Long, and Goldsworthy broke the gallery's hold on art by placing works in landscapes. Beaumont, deCaires Taylor, and Aitken pushed this further into ocean environments. David Pisani codified this as Ocean Art. And now, through the work of practitioners like Emma-Claire Fierce, Beach Art establishes itself as the governed, accessible, public-facing branch of this movement—the literal and metaphorical "street" where art meets the sea.

We must also distinguish between Art (which may be silent, beautiful, and temporary, yet still expresses artistic intent) and Decoration (which merely makes the view prettier for the tourist without artistic inquiry).

Emma-Claire Fierce's "26 S1 Jean 2 Monts" stands as a prime example: a physical, public intervention that existed briefly on the "street" of the beach. Its power lay not in a shouted message, but in its silent presence and its race against the tide. It challenged the viewer to look, to notice, and to care before it was gone. The ocean provides a model to accommodate change and unpredictability; Beach Art ensures that model remains accountable to the humans who share its shores, creating art that is as fragile, contested, and alive as the streets themselves.

References

1. Tate. *Art Term: Land Art*. Tate Glossary, 2024.
2. Curtis, Katherine. *Observe, Submerge, Speculate: Contemporary Art and the Ocean*. PhD Thesis, 2021 – Chapter 3 on "From Land Art to Ocean Art."
3. Aitken, Doug and Gutsch, Cyrill. Interview in *Document Journal*, December 2016 – Underwater Pavilions project.
4. Wikipedia. "Jason deCaires Taylor." Updated 2023.
5. Morse, Erik. "Why Artists Are Returning to 'Oceanic Thinking'." *ArtReview*, 22 June 2022.
6. One Ocean Hub. "Mainstreaming ocean art and culture in ocean management." Blog post, 23 June 2022.
7. Pisani, David; Billiard, Elise; Fierce, Emma-Claire. *New Art Concept: Ocean Art*. BRAZZA RESIDENCY Document, 18 July 2025.
8. Deloughrey, Elizabeth. *Routes and Roots: Navigating Knowledge in the Pacific Ocean*. University of Hawai'i Press, 2019.

9. Lippard, Lucy. *Overlay: Contemporary Art and the Art of Prehistory*. Pantheon Books, 1983.
10. UNSC LOS Convention. United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. 1982.
11. Smithson, Robert. *Entropies and Reversals*. Collected Writings, 1979.
12. Goldsworthy, Andy. *Hand to Earth*. Victoria and Albert Museum Catalogue, 1990.
13. Long, Richard. *Line in the Landscape*. Thames & Hudson, 1987.
14. Beaumont, Betty. "Ocean Landmark Project Documentation." Whitney Museum Archives, 1980-1982.
15. Hessler, Stefanie. *Waterworlds: Ocean Futures in Art and Science*. TBA21–Academy Publications, 2021.

Publication Note: This paper proposes Beach Art as a theoretically rigorous category derived from existing Ocean Art frameworks. It explicitly distinguishes "Art" from "Decoration" based on artistic intent and inquiry, acknowledging that art may pursue beauty, contemplation, or politics without requiring explicit confrontation. It further refines the concept of "confrontation" to include the subtle challenge of unannounced presence and the temporal pressure of ephemerality, which forces the viewer to engage with the work before it disappears. The inclusion of established artists (Smithson, Goldsworthy, Long, deCaires Taylor, Beaumont, Aitken) alongside emerging practitioners (Fierce, Pisani) demonstrates both historical continuity and contemporary innovation. Formal academic recognition will require peer-reviewed publication, practitioner adoption, and institutional validation over time.